

Committee on Resources

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Place:

Seeley Lake Elementary School

200 School Lane

Seeley Lake, MT

Text of Testimony:

To the Members of the Committee on Resources:

My Name is Sherm Anderson. I am currently serving as a State Senator for the great state of Montana. In my "other life," I own and operate Sun Mountain Logging LLC in Deer Lodge, Montana, a family-owned business that employs approximately 40 people. My father preceded me in the timber business and my two sons are continuing the tradition.

We are in the business of supplying professional timber harvesting services to sawmills, paper mills, pole yards, private landowners and state and federal governments.

As professional timber harvesters, what we do on the ground has a multitude of benefits, some of which are: creating enhanced wildlife habitat; creation of home sites; clearing for recreation, such as ski areas; creating productive land for grazing and mining; control of insects or disease; the suppression and risk reduction for wildfire; and commercial forest management, including the utilization of salvage material from natural occurrences such as wildfire, wind-throw, winter-kill or insect and disease epidemics.

In the last 10 to 15 years our business has changed considerably. Operations on national forest land previously occupied about 80 to 90% of our business, while only 10 to 20% was on State and private lands. The current situation is just the reverse: 80 to 90% of our work is on State and private ground and 10 to 20% is on National Forests.

Understanding that only one-third of Montana's forests are privately owned, the consequences of this shift are monumental, ranging from economic instability for rural communities to unhealthy and mismanaged federal forests. One consequence is the fact that the footprint of commercial timber harvesting is too heavily burdening private lands. A primary concept of forest stewardship suggests that we should be removing less timber from more acreage, not removing more timber from fewer acres.

This change has not taken place because of a lack of opportunity on our national forests or because of a decreasing need to manage our national forests. It has come about because of National Forest policy changes that have handcuffed the very forest and land managers that we, the citizens of this country hired as stewards of our national forests.

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We asked them to professionally manage the vast resources our National Forests contain,...and then we handicapped them with restrictive laws and policies. If we, the citizens of Montana and the United States, wanted politicians and judges to micro-manage our forests, why did we hire professional land managers in the first place? We simply need to return the management of federal forests back to professional forest stewards. Well-intended congressional laws have been transformed into perverse forest policies--and, as a result, the judiciary is now the ultimate manager of federal forests in this country.

On the other hand, positive change that has come about in the past 10 to 15 years is the improvement in technology that enables us to do a much better job, such as the ability to walk lighter on the land. Space-age satellite imagery and computers have enhanced our knowledge of how forests function beyond any comprehension we had just a couple of decades back. Today, we can more effectively utilize the products we all demand--and consume-- from our forests.

My purpose in becoming involved in politics is probably not much different from yours. I am compelled to try to make a difference in Montana-- to do what I can to help shape laws, rules and policies, especially those pertaining to our natural resources. Our forests are in a terrible condition due to lack of attention. I see it every day. The need for the product growing in our forests continues to increase yet some folks are more content to import wood products to satisfy our needs while letting our own forests die and burn, costing the tax payers millions upon millions of dollars in fire suppression, with the unintended consequence of dirty air, dirty water, loss of wildlife habitat, loss of homes and loss of life.

There is something seriously wrong with this picture. We need to do something about changing it. I believe the President's Healthy Forest Restoration Act is a step in the right direction and I appreciate your passionate support for this Act.

Programs like Forest Stewardship Contracting are working well; however, they need to be applied to a larger landscape if they are to ever meet the ideals of forest stewardship.

Categorical Exclusions are another tool that may help our resource managers protect the public's interests and to get something beneficial done on the ground.

These are some of the many things that can and should be done now! Montana and other states are losing the infrastructure that is needed to manage our forests. The truth-and the consequences-of that fact is evident in Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona. There is virtually no manufacturing infrastructure remaining in those states to do any needed forest management. The past two seasons of catastrophic fires have proven to be devastating to these states.

Our own state has suffered severely with the fires of 2000 and 2001, and our infrastructure continues to deteriorate, hampering our ability to reduce the fuels-loading in our forests. In the past ten years alone Montana has lost nearly 20 primary manufacturing facilities.

There is no exact science and very few guarantees when it comes to forest management except that if we continue to do nothing we can be certain the result will be more fires and more devastation.

I hope you will join those of us who are striving to make a difference, to restore the health of our forests.

Thank you for coming to visit our great state and for your concern. I appreciate this opportunity to testify and

above all, thank you for the hard work you do on our behalf.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sherm Anderson